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ZOOM

in on america

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SPORTS: THE AMERICAN WAY

Whether poet or politician, carpenter or cardiologist, Americans from all walks of life share an interest in athletic competition. Sports are both a social glue bonding the country together and a vehicle for transmitting such values as justice and fair play, team work and sacrifice. They have contributed to racial and social integration, and even to the development of language, as sports terms and expressions slide into everyday usage. Sports also have been a popular focus for the arts, particularly in novels and films.

Venus Williams at the Australian Open 2004 (©AP/WWP/Steve Holland)

About two decades ago, foreign audiences started tuning in to American pro sports, especially **basketball**, in previously unheard of numbers. Teenagers snapped up player jerseys and stayed up past midnight to watch games on live television. Soon, they were imitating the moves on their own courts and fields.

So what happened?
In two words: **Michael Jordan**.

More than any single athlete, Jordan, the magnetic and charismatic Chicago Bulls superstar, transformed American sports into a global phenomenon.



On the left: **Venus Williams**, a professional **tennis** player, winner of 2 Wimbledon and 2 U.S. Open singles titles, 2000 Olympic singles and doubles gold medalist:

Some people say I have attitude - maybe I do... but I think you have to. You have to believe in yourself when no one else does - that makes you a winner.

Venus's sister Serena is also a top-ranking American tennis player. They met in the finals of the 2001 and 2002 U.S. Open tournament. Each won once.

Apart from basketball and **American football** which was imported to Europe as the NFL Europe League, **baseball**, an American sport probably least known outside the United States, has found its way to different corners of the world.

The city of Kutno, Poland, with a population of 50,000, is building baseball and softball facilities. The European Center for Little League Baseball will serve the needs of over 50 European, African and Asian countries. The Center already boasts two baseball stadiums and two fields as well as large support facilities.

The citizens of Kutno, both kids and adults, have been playing baseball since 1984.

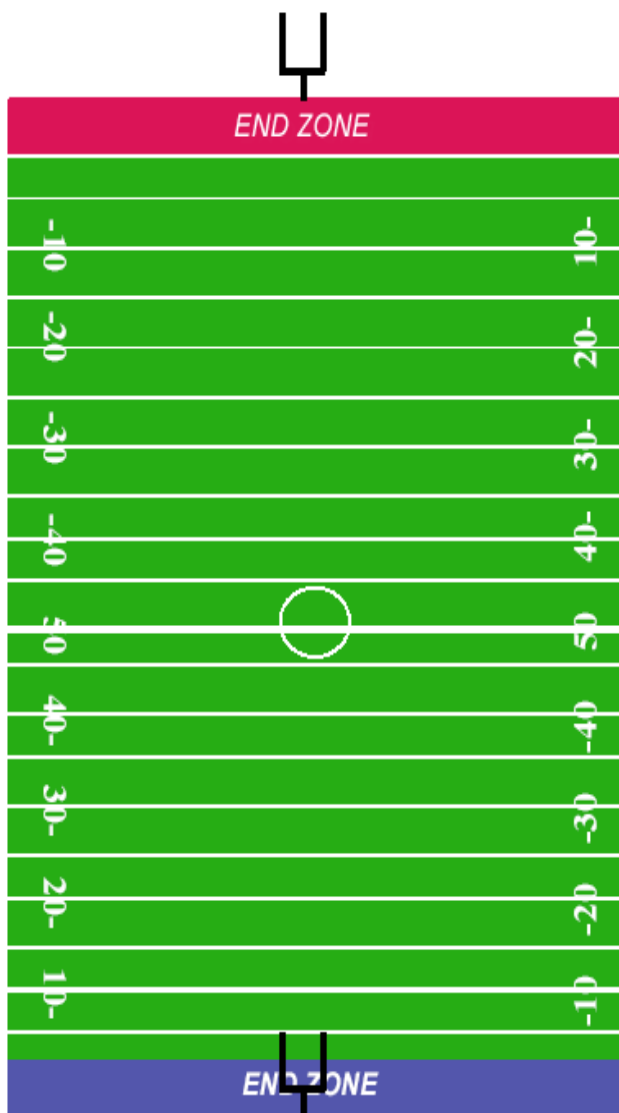
Based in part on "Sports in America" Electronic Journal available in full version here: <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itsv/1203/ijse/ijse1203.htm>

In This Issue: The Mystery of American Football, Quizzes, Win a Book!

ZOOM in on America

■ The Mystery of American Football

So you've always wanted to know: is there more to American football than running, pushing and throwing a funny-looking ball?



There are two teams with **11** players on each side. The game begins with one team (the **offense**) having **possession** of the football.

Players on the offensive team may **run** with the ball or **throw** it. The aim is to get the ball into an area called the **end zone** to score points.

The **defense** tries to stop the offensive team and take over possession of the ball. If it succeeds or the offensive team scores, the teams **switch roles**.

The offense has four chances (or **downs**) to gain **10 yards** in the direction of the end zone. If the team succeeds in moving the ball 10 or more yards, it gets another set of four downs. If the team fails, it **loses possession** of the ball.

If the player carrying the ball is knocked to the ground — or **tackled** — play is stopped.

There are different ways to score points. To get **six points** the team must score a **touchdown** — they must carry the ball across the goal line into the end zone (or catch it there from a passing player). After scoring a touchdown, the team may score another **point**: a player tries to kick the ball through the **goal posts**. The offense may also try to kick a **field goal**, worth **3 points** — a player called a **placekicker** must kick the ball through the goal-post uprights and over the **crossbar**.

A game has four quarters (each lasting 15 minutes). There may be **overtime** in case of a **tie**.

The field measures **100 yards** (91 meters) **long** and **53 yards** (48 meters) **wide**. The end zones on each end of the field measure additional **10 yards** (9 meters). There are white lines on the field called **yard markers** to help everyone see how far the ball is from the end zone.

■ At the Movies

Here are some great movies about American football:

Any Given Sunday (*Męska Gra*) from 1999 starring Al Pacino and Cameron Diaz; about the struggles of football players, their coaches and club owners. Contains some of the best sport action scenes ever! Directed by Oliver Stone.

Jerry Maguire (*Jerry Maguire*) from 1996 starring Tom Cruise and Renée Zellweger; about a sports agent and his only client - a troubled American football player.

The Replacements (*Sezon Rezerwowych*) from 2000 starring Keanu Reeves; about a bunch of substitute players hired by club owners during a pro football strike.



Donovan McNabb of Philadelphia Eagles (AP Photo/David Duprey)

■ Sports in American Literature

The famous novelist John Irving often writes about characters who are in one way or another involved in amateur wrestling. This sport is given special prominence in "The World According to Garp" (*Świat według Garpa*). He says about the main character, T. S. Garp:

...He knew he had found his sport and his pastime; it would take the best of his energy until the writing came along. He loved the singleness of the combat, and the frightening confines of that circle inscribed on the mat; the terrific conditioning; the mental constancy of keeping his weight down...

The best athletes often become authors when they choose to write autobiographies.

Lance Armstrong, a five-time consecutive winner of the most prestigious cycling race in the world, the Tour de France, is the author of "It's Not about the Bike: My Journey Back to Life" (available in Polish bookstores as *Mój powrót do życia*). It tells the story not only of Armstrong's sports career but also of his battle with cancer.

Especially dynamic sports, such as basketball, may best be described by poets.

Here's an excerpt from Pulitzer prize-winner Yusef Komunyakaa's *Slam Dunk and Hook*:

...
Dribble, drive to the inside, feint,
& glide like a sparrow hawk.
Lay ups. Fast breaks.
We had moves we didn't know
We had. Our bodies spun
On swivels of bone & faith,
Through a lyric slipknot
Of joy, & we knew we were
Beautiful & dangerous.
...

You may read the entire poem and listen to an audio file here:

<http://www.ibiblio.org/ipa/komunyakaa/slamdunk.html>

■ Watch Out for the Game!

The American and Polish national soccer teams will have a chance again to test their skills in two matches scheduled for March and July.

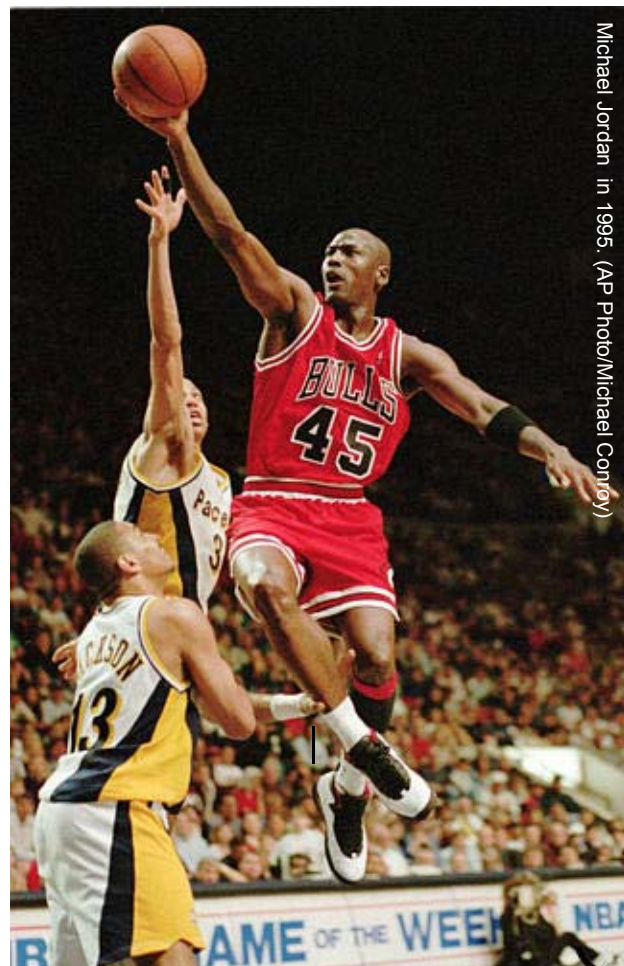
These will be the 13th and 14th meetings between the two teams. So far the USA has won 7 matches, lost 1 and tied 4.

The two teams met in the same group at the last World Cup in South Korea in 2002. It was the U.S. who advanced to the next stage despite a match lost against Poland 3:1.

The March 31 match will take place in Plock. The venue for a rematch in the United States on July 11 has not yet been determined.

At the moment the United States ranks 11th and Poland 26th in the FIFA/Coca-Cola World Ranking of men's teams.

See: <http://www.usinfo.pl/events/docs/soccer.htm>



Michael Jordan in 1995. (AP Photo/Michael Conroy)

Win a Book!

To take part in a drawing for one of three English-language books check out our website:

www.usinfo.pl/zoom/ and find the answer to the following question:

How many points does an American football team get if it scores a touchdown?

Send your answer to:
zoom@usinfo.pl

State your name, address, and age. The deadline is March 31.

Good Luck!

The winners of the competition from the previous issue come from Brzezine, Tarnowskie Gory and Warszawa and will soon receive their prizes by mail.

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Warsaw
Ambasada USA
ul. Piękna 14, 00-540
Warszawa
airc_warsaw@pd.state.gov

Kraków
Konsulat Generalny USA
ul. Stolarska 9, 31-043
Kraków
KrakowAIRC@state.gov

■ Match Idioms & Explanations

We found our way around Washington, D.C., without getting lost, but New York City is a **whole new ball game**.

At this time all we need is a **ballpark figure**. We can be exact later.

The teacher **threw us a curve ball** when he announced that each student would have to bring his own food to the school picnic.

When they found out he was receiving bribes, the Senator knew it was time to **throw in the towel**.

The girls from my class **huddled** to discuss the boys' appalling behavior.

an estimate

to fool, surprise; to bring up the unexpected

to gather together; to consult

a new set of circumstances

to quit; to give up

■ Sports Countdown

Check out these sports statistics. How would do read them out? Write your answers.

Number of Americans who watched the 2003 Super Bowl (American football championship) on TV: **137.7 million**

A hundred and thirty-seven point seven million

Number of women playing on U.S. college varsity sports teams in 2000-01: **150,916**

Number of American youth under 19 registered to play soccer in 2001: **3.9 million**

The world record for men's 100 meters run is **9.78 seconds**

■ Is It a Cup or Is It a Bowl?

Match names of American and international sporting events with the correct sports discipline. Make only **one** choice for each event.

Super Bowl

Stanley Cup

The World Series

MLS Cup

Ryder Cup

Davis Cup

ice hockey

tennis

golf

baseball

American football

soccer

Find Correct **Answers** at: www.usinfo.pl/zoom